

**Governor's Rural Affairs Council Meeting
March 10, 2016**

**Crown Plaza Hotel
3000 S. Dirksen Parkway, Room Plaza F
Springfield, Illinois**

I. Working Group Organizational Sessions Prior to GRAC Meeting (2-3pm)

- a. Economic Development – Plaza D
- b. Workforce Development – Plaza E
- c. Health – Plaza F
- d. Education – Plaza F

II. GRAC meeting called to order by Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti at 3:09PM. A roll call was then conducted:

Member Agencies Present:

Illinois Community College Board, Lavon Nelson
Illinois Department of Agriculture, Rebecca Clark
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Wendy Bell
Illinois Department of Employment Security, Shelly Tweedy
Illinois Department of Human Services, Francisco Alvarado
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Steve Ettinger
Illinois Department on Aging, Burt Weber
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.
Illinois Finance Authority, Patrick Evans
Illinois Housing Development Authority, Bill Pluta
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Christopher Merrett
Rural Partners, Blanche Shoup
Southern Illinois University, Joshua Sarver
University of Illinois Extension, Chris Casey

Not Present: Illinois Department of Transportation, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Agricultural Association (Farm Bureau).

Citizen Members Present:

Sonia Reese
Luke Allen
Larry Richards
Todd Kaeb

Citizen Members Not Present:

Heather Hampton-Knodle
Doug Hanks

Nonvoting Members Present:

Norman Walzer, NIU
USDA, Dwight Reynolds sitting in for Colleen Callahan

Lt. Governor's Office Present: Susan Bence, Kaitlin Kinser, Ennedy Rivera, Brian Costin, Brian Colgan, and Jesus Solorio.

- III. Opening Remarks** – Lt. Governor opened the meeting with a greeting and remarks about the economic development conference. She then introduced the idea of having the GRAC membership coalesce around the four working groups. By playing to the strengths of the GRAC membership, she was optimistic that the GRAC could generate useful outcomes for rural Illinois.
- IV. Approved meeting minutes from December 4, 2015.**
- V. Working Group Summaries.** There are four main focus areas: (i) Economic Development, (ii), Workforce Development, (iii) Health, and (iv) Education. GRAC members were asked for their preferences and then assigned to one of the four working groups. Working group members were asked to meet prior to the GRAC meeting. Their task was to develop some objectives and specific tasks that might be achieved over the next 12 months. Each of the working groups was then asked to report back to the entire GRAC group:
- a. Economic Development (Todd Kaeb)
 - i. Started meeting with introductions to learn what each individual brings to the table in terms of expertise and resources.
 - ii. The questions they are trying to answer include: what is the true need of small businesses and how do we create a mechanism or way so that these entrepreneurs can find the resources needed to start their businesses? How can we use programs to make a vehicle where information can be found and needs addressed? Are fairs viable? Is having a web portal beneficial?
 - iii. Having a portal was discussed as viable and probably the best solution. It needs to be determined if the benefits will outweigh the possible costs of such a portal.
 - iv. Action Items / Questions Raised:
 - 1. Do other states have portals?
 - 2. Look at if fairs have been successful in other areas, how they can be done more effectively, and how to get small businesses there.
 - 3. Explore the extent to which economic development is tied to, or can be promoted using social media.
 - 4. We should be exploring how to create an environment that will guide small businesses and help them to find answers to questions they may have.
 - v. They will be doing conference calls every 6 weeks between regular meetings.
 - vi. The working group was inspired by the quote because of its emphasis on teamwork and collaboration: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”
 - b. Workforce Development (Norm Walzer)
 - i. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act has recently been implemented. State of Illinois has a workforce plan and there is not as much emphasis on rural development as there could be. Working group participants asked if rural work force stakeholders really know looking forward what kind of jobs are available and what will be needed. One strategy to improve rural workforce development might be to build on regional activities of existing agencies. Comments were made about the specific targets a workforce development plan should have. These specific targets include:
 - 1. Employer needs
 - 2. Educators delivering the services (including middle schools, high schools, and community colleges)
 - 3. Parents because they are not setting high enough expectations.
 - ii. Understand millennials as disconnected because they are not working due to slow economic recovery and not really productive. In addition to a focus on millennials, we need to access the entire K-12th grade pipeline for progress to be made.

- iii. What could we do to build on the statewide efforts and realizing that each of the regions will have a plan by May 1, 2016?
- iv. 3 Strategies this working group could follow include:
 - 1. Best Practices/ Education (Vermillion Advantage). The GRAC could help identify examples of successful local workforce development projects
 - 2. Assess current needs through employer and educator surveys
 - 3. Manage the information flow between various agencies that address workforce development issues.
- v. Provide information and raise the level of credibility by the use of Worker Opportunity Tax credit.
- vi. Stem versus STEAM (The A stands for art). Creative industries (the arts) will allow rural people to stay in rural communities. The notion here is to expand upon the STEM (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and math) subjects to also include the arts, because of their important positive impact on student achievement.
- vii. Announcer comment: We should be opening this up to more people than just parents and students. We should be holding our teachers accountable for bringing more manufacturing into the classroom. Students don't always know what manufacturing opportunities there are available.
- viii. Todd Kaeb question: How do you look at whether workforce development is being driven from education down or demand (i.e. employer) down? How would small businesses go about finding support from the state to help fill open positions?
- ix. Department of Employment Security (Shelly Tweedy) - The IDES helps match employers with job seekers, they also host a series of workshops on how to better market yourself to employers and how to present their skills to potential employers.
- x. Blanche Shoup - Sector partnerships are in the works for our regional plan.
- c. Health (Sonja Reece and Larry Richards)
 - i. Plaudits for Lt. Governor attending ribbon cutting at Eureka Hospital.
 - ii. There are several issues of importance to this group:
 - 1. Support expanding telehealth as a way to reduce costs while increasing access.
 - 2. Examining shortage of skilled physicians.
 - 3. We will be looking for alternative strategies to deliver health care in rural places.
 - 4. Guide to communities to create alternate health care delivery.
- d. Education (Luke Allen and Chris Merrett)
 - i. Education cuts across so many aspects of rural society. This raised the question of adopting a multi-faceted approach because the committees might be more successful with collaboration, at least on some topics.
 - ii. Many challenges to education include school funding and broadband accessibility. These issues can limit educational opportunities for rural students. However, there are innovative bright spots such as the CEO entrepreneurship mentoring program. Many GRAC members, including the Lt. Governor support exploring ways to help expand the CEO program.
 - iii. Following up on the notion of working group collaboration, Norm Walzer sees a close link between workforce development and education.
 - iv. Blanche Shoup mentioned that with job losses comes the need for retraining. Creative ideas such as stackable credits can help. She also supports the CEO mentoring program.

VI. Annual Report. Each year, the GRAC must submit an annual report on the state of rural Illinois. The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) works with the Office of the Lt. Governor to write and submit the report by August 1 of each year. In order to make the report as comprehensive as possible, agency representatives to the GRAC are asked to submit short narratives describing some of the challenges and successes they experience delivering programs in rural Illinois during the

previous year. In order to complete the 2016 report, the Lt. Governor has asked that a preliminary draft be completed and shared with the GRAC membership by the May 19th GRAC meeting. A second draft will be made available for review by the July 14th meeting so that it can be approved by the August 1 submission deadline. In order to provide examples of the kind of projects that could be included in the report, Chris Merrett from the IIRA described that the 2015 GRAC report summarized the Home Grown by Heroes project sponsored by the Office of the Lt. Governor. Brian Colgan suggested that we could do an assessment of broadband accessibility in rural areas. Broadband is important because it impacts so many issues, including all of the working groups.

VII. New Business

- a. Action item: Ethics and OMA requirements for the council.
 - i. Motion for Ennedy Rivera to be FOIA officer for the GRAC.
 - ii. Blanche Shoup moves
 - iii. Bill Pluto seconds
- b. EMS Summit- SIU Center for Rural Health and Social Services Development. The summit will be held on April 5 at the Memorial Center for Learning and Innovation in Springfield. More information is available at www.siumed.edu/cpd.
- c. Rural Development Guide. There is a portal for economic development. The portal is available on the IIRA website at <http://www.iira.org>. The data base is searchable using the key words, state agency name, or by type of program. It is hard to keep it up to date, because state agencies and programs are added, evolve, or are eliminated over time. All agencies should check the portal to make sure their information is accurate and make suggestions for changes. Email addresses and phone numbers are included in the portal, so that a real person can be contacted to answer questions.
- d. 2016 GRAC meeting dates:
 - i. 5/19 Springfield - Department of Agriculture, State Fair Grounds - 11AM
 - ii. 7/14 Springfield - Department of Agriculture, State Fair Grounds - 11AM
 - iii. 11/15 Springfield - Department of Agriculture, State Fair Grounds - 11AM

VIII. Member Updates

- a. Wendy Bell, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). The Community Development Block Grant program has allocated \$26,000,000 for rural areas in Illinois.
- b. Bill Pluta, Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA). They usually provide a report for all the programs and projects they have funded in the last year, so it will be sent to Chris Merrett for the Annual Report. Some of the rental property projects included: (i) Diamond Senior Apartments in Princeton, (ii) Macoupin Homes in Macoupin County, (iii) Dixon Square in Dixon, (iv) St. James Place in Pontiac, (v) Bond County Homes in Greenville, and (vi) Morton Senior Residence close to Peoria. First time home buyer program has been really successful in 2015. They work with local participating lenders to provide low interest rates and financing for first time home buyers. They have done 2,020 loans totaling \$185,000,000 in the 82 counties that are either rural or have rural parts. Each year, the IHDA hosts a Conference on Affordable Housing. At the conference there is a section for the Governor's Affordable Housing Champion awards. This year, there will be a session where they can present their projects to the audience that is in attendance. This year the awardee is Maplewood Apartments in Harris, IL.
- c. Chris Casey, U of I Extension. U of I Extension offers a plethora of programs. Chris Casey distributed brochures documenting several community development programs offered by UI Extension. He highlighted the University of Illinois Leadership Academy. This is a series of five workshops starting in April and culminating in October with a graduation ceremony held at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in Springfield, Illinois. This workshop is specifically designed for newly elected and appointed county officials.

- d. Francisco Alvarado, Department of Human Services (DHS). The DHS Division for Rehabilitation Services is working to compile data on individuals with disabilities that have been helped to find employment in rural areas. They are also looking at the number of small businesses they helped to start in rural areas. Statewide, the DHS serves about 42,000 individuals annually and 15,000-18,000 of those people live in rural areas. They also just completed a survey of farm workers and data is being reviewed at this time.
- e. Blanche Shoup, Rural Partners. Blanche noted that Susan Wynn Bence from the Office of the Lt. Governor has joined the Rural Partners Board of Directors.
- f. Patrick Evans, Illinois Finance Authority (IFA). The IFA completed a number of loan applications for rural firetrucks and EMS services. There are 26 fire truck applications and 18 ambulance applications.

IX. No public comment

X. Adjournment. GRAC meeting adjourned 4:23PM

- a. Motioned by Luke Allen
- b. Seconded by Bill Pluta

Respectfully Submitted by
Chris Merrett, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University